

ASSOCIATED PRESS

28 October 1983

WASHINGTON

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Cuba was tipped off to U.S. plans to invade Grenada at 1 [redacted] before the attack began, possibly explaining why the 1,100-man Cuban force seemed so well prepared for the assault, U.S. intelligence sources said Friday night.

Sources, who spoke on condition they not be identified, said the warning came from an "unintentional" leak from one of the Caribbean nations which joined the United States in the invasion Tuesday.

The sources refused to disclose which of the six countries leaked the information.

Although learning of the invasion plans, Cuba's President Fidel Castro did not send reinforcements to the island, but did dispatch an army colonel to direct the island defense, the sources said.

U.S. Marines and Army paratroopers who landed on Grenada in the pre-dawn hours Tuesday were surprised by the stiffer-than-expected defense mounted by the Cubans and the Grenadian army. The possibility of a leak could help explain why the defenders were able to prevent U.S. forces from obtaining their main objectives on the first day.

Meanwhile, the Navy admiral who commanded the invasion force and a White House spokesman disputed suggestions that U.S. intelligence had failed by underestimating the number of Cubans on the island by about half.

"You can't know everything," said deputy press secretary Larry Speakes, who added that there was no U.S. intelligence operation in Grenada. "You do your best."

Adm. Wesley McDonald, commander in chief of the Atlantic fleet, said, "I didn't have enough intelligence, but there wasn't an intelligence failure. ... I don't think the system failed. We just didn't have the time to focus on it."

Initial estimates put the number of Cubans on Grenada at 600, a figure that was raised to "upwards of 1,000" once the U.S.-led invasion of the island got under way early Tuesday. McDonald said the estimate was 1,100 Cubans, with more than 300 still fighting.

President Reagan said he launched the invasion at the request of six eastern Caribbean nations concerned about a bloody leftist coup on Grenada and the possibility that violence would spread to them.

U.S. intelligence hastily compiled what it could about Cuban and Grenadian military strength last week as final plans were put together for the invasion, Reagan administration sources said, but the CIA estimate proved off the mark when U.S. forces landed on the island.

U.S. officials, speaking publicly and privately, have expressed surprise at the number of Cubans on the island and the determined fight mounted by Cuban and Grenadian defenders.